POWER TO THOSE
WHO WIELD THEIR GRIEF
LIKE A KNIFE AT THE
THROAT OF THE WORLD

IF WE GO, WE GO ON FIRE

On Grief and Social War

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those who stared down the barrel of this hell-world and refused it with the entirety of their being. None of us make it out of this world alive, and there can be a deep (if final) reclamation of power in dictating the terms of your exit. But know that, selfishly, I hope you stick around a little longer.

I'm not going to sell you some vision of hope or claim that if you just hold out a few more years, or months, or minutes the end of your suffering is on the horizon. I have no desire to sell you anything or to dictate how you should or shouldn't relate to your life. But I will tell you that there is still meaning to be found here if you want it, though you have to want it, and that there is beauty to be found here, too. It is a beautiful thing to fight for a life worth living, even as the logic and rationality of the cruelty of this world attempts to beat that fight out of us. It is a beautiful thing to refuse a world built upon the suffering of so many, built upon your own suffering. It is a beautiful thing to help others to wield their grief, to articulate their desire, to find their will to fight. The meaning is yours to make.

Wherever you are, whoever you are, know that if you move with intention and desire for the end of this world of death machines, I move with you. For every strike you land against the institutions of our suffering, I cheer for you. For every blow you suffer, every time your head hits concrete and you're made to taste your own blood, I rage with you. And when I wield my grief like a weapon, like a knife at the throat of this hell-world, I do so holding you in my heart. We may never meet, may never know one another, but we fight together even as we fight alone.

Know this.

I. Coming Up for Air

If I hand you the knife
Would you carve me gills
So that I might finally breathe
In this brackish mud

It is early December, 2024. Everything I have written in the last year has started with the same contextual notes. I name the present month and I state that Israel continues to wage genocidal violence against the Palestinian people with the boundless support of the United States. I state that the police continue to murder young and old alike with impunity on front lawns and in kitchens, in subway stations and apartment complexes. I state that our world is dominated by, and built upon, the horrors of anti-Blackness, colonialism, ableism cisheteropatriarchy and so many other pillars of oppressive violence. I state that rent is due and that it's getting fucking cold. Nothing has changed. All of this remains to be the reality we exist within. Every piece I write pulls inspiration from some internal drive to communicate something meaningful from within the chasm of desperate-desire-for-something-other-than-what-is that I have called home for as long as I can remember. But this piece is drawn from my veins with a bit more personal pain, and so I will state a few more facts of the present moment.

Three weeks ago, I was told that an old friend was dead, the third in as many winters. Friend isn't quite the right word, but it's easier to say than person-I-ran-with-in-the-streets-for-a-few-years-in-incredibly-stressful-situations-but-never-really-made-time-to-hang-out-with. So, I will just say friend. I hadn't thought about them in at least two years and now I wake up every morning, from a different couch or spare bed, recalling

some memory previously lost to time. Each memory seems to dig up some deeper, barely connected, grief that had long laid dormant.

There is little rhyme or reason to which wave comes when, what thought steals my attention for so long that I forget to eat breakfast, and then lunch, and then it's already dark and I don't have the energy to figure out something for dinner and so I just go to bed. The feeling of being hungry is a comfort compared to the feeling of dread from which it distracts. I stare at the wall and remember when Deandre Ballard was murdered by a security guard outside of his college apartment and we couldn't even put enough pressure on the city to get the surveillance footage released. I became friends with his uncle as the protests grew smaller and the world felt sharper and the wind more cutting. I remember the last time I saw him we embraced outside of a Walmart. He told me he had footage of the pigs kicking my shit in from a demo turned beatdown. He asked if I thought it might help my court case. That was four years ago now.

I'm thinking of the last time I had charges, after the aforementioned getting my shit kicked in; how afraid I was every time I stepped into a courtroom; how alone I felt staring down a judge on my last court date. Alone in terms of having no comrades with me, but together with everyone else who faced the judge alone. I will never take for granted that the main thing which kept me out of prison is the assistant DA choked under pressure just before my lawyer did when the judge said it was time for trial. For the last four years it has been a joke amongst my friends that I believe "pants are court clothes". It's easier to play up that joke than to admit stepping into anything

another in earnest. We must find one another as we are. We must find a way to fully embody the grief we bear and, in doing so, encourage others to do the same. We must carry one another and allow ourselves to be carried in turn. To find one another is to crack this dichotomy of "alone" and "together", to make these words synonyms, to recognize we are always both.

We must weep alone, together.
We must wail alone, together.
We must thrash alone, together.
We must fight alone, together.
We must burn alone, together.

When you resist the death machines, no matter how tall the shadows around you and how far from others you feel, you may be alone, but you are also with all of us who resist. When you raise a brick against the police at the riot or barricade or alone in an alley, you do so with all those who know the taste of state violence and who refuse to accept its assumed permanence. When you strike against the commodity form, through theft or sabotage or a refusal to work, you do so with all those who refused to be lubricant for the gears of that ecocidal and genocidal project. Every action you take to articulate, and fight for, the world you desire is taken in concert with all who desire something similar. You are alone, and you are together.

Even when you feel weak, when the grief is once again a burden instead of weapon and it all feels too much and the walls close in from all sides, when living to see the next sun rise feels as unlikely as realizing the worlds we hold in our hearts, you may be alone but you are also with all of us who sit awake unsure of whether we'll see dawn. And if you decide to make your exit, quietly or on fire, you do so alone but alongside all

IV. Find Me in the Hurricane

I want to wake up tomorrow
with no memory you ever existed
I want to wake up tomorrow

In the end, each of us is alone in this world. There will always be a gap between how we experience the nuances and complexities of our suffering and our ability to express that suffering to, and be understood by, one another. We feel isolated. We claw at our own throats to make sound and we claw at the ears of others to be heard while hiding behind metaphor and euphemism for fear of exposing our own insecurities. In a world so cruel, so intentionally built upon the suffering of the vulnerable and marginalized, the logical decision is to detach and dissociate, to harden ourselves from anything that may make us vulnerable.

But to grieve, openly and willingly, is to refuse this game, this spectacle, this soulless choreography. It is to make oneself vulnerable against all logic of self-preservation. It is to scream, not to be heard but because you wish to make the ground shake beneath you. It is to claw, not for recognition, but to draw blood from a world that has left you battered and bloodied. It is to live, as you are, without a mask or obfuscation as to just how fucked it is to exist like this. It is to pry open the jaws of the death machines and with fist and stone and blood and tears demand nothing short of a life worth living for yourself and all those around you.

If we are to really find one another in a way that offers the possibility of a world beyond this one of death and only death, if we desire to genuinely live beyond survival, we must find one resembling what I wore to court causes my guts to churn whenever I look in a mirror.

These thoughts of acute grief inevitably give way to the broad and impersonal grief that is existing with any intentionality/awareness in this world of death machines. Every manifestation of genocide, every act of police brutality, every eviction, every encampment sweep, every person denied medical care, every hour of life sacrificed to work builds the grief in my blood towards toxicity. I open my mouth to scream but no sound comes out. I try to go through the motions of my day, but my brain is molten and leaking from my nose. I try to swallow the grief until it all but chokes me, threatens to burn me up from the inside out. I am afraid. I thrash against the waves until I am exhausted and I begin to drown.

But despite the fear and exhaustion, there is something powerful to be found beneath the waves, as your mouth fills with sand and the water rushes into your lungs. Through the pain and despair there is a clarity that insurmountable grief opens up. Grief is not merely something that happens to us that we must swallow. It offers a framework, a logic against logic that seems to cut the world in two; what matters from what doesn't, what we desire from what is forced upon us. Grief does not need to be a burden, or at least not only a burden, for us to bear.

Grief can be a weapon for us to wield.

II. Grief as (Framework) Weapon

Power to those who wield their grief
like a knife at the throat of the world

As I said, grief offers a logic against logic that cuts the world in two. When I say "logic against logic" I refer to how outside of the experience of grief, one often defers to some sense of preservation of the self as existing in the status quo. Even the self-described radical often chooses a course of action (intentionally or not) that reproduces every day before in every day after. It all stays and it all stays the same.

But grief (especially acute grief) offers the ability to discern what is meaningful from what has always been slowly rotting away your senses with greater clarity and swiftness than anything else I've experienced. The spectacle of the commodity form, once so enticing and captivating, becomes nothing more than a strobe light killing our ability to see in the dark. Work, once something that gave you so much stress or heartache becomes simply a series of repetitive motions you perform without thinking (if you fuck up it doesn't matter, being fired would be a blessing and you'll gladly help your boss bite a curb if he thinks you should move faster).

With this clarity of meaning comes a clarity of what it is we really have to fear. The big-picture fears start to loom over the day-to-day. "If I scream at my boss I could be fired" is replaced with "If I waste my life at this job, I'll die hating myself". "If I fight this cop I'll be beaten, jailed, or killed" is replaced with "If I walk by this cop the world of his violence will continue, unending. I can't live like this". The institutions of our in death, that to truly live we must fight for life writ large not mere survival.

Through our ability to help one another articulate our suffering, we help one another to act. And in helping one another to act we help to demonstrate to those around us that something different, something other than what currently is, is possible. When we unabashedly grieve, fully, publicly, without reservation, we invite other to do the same. Every act of resistance sows the seeds of its own replication. When we resist as part of daily life, we sow the reproduction of a daily life of resistance.

A friend once told me about the impact of seeing a rock thrown at a jail window for the first time. They told me how that opened up the language to express themselves in a way they didn't have access to before. In witnessing someone else articulate their grief and desire, succinctly through the long arc of a stone, they gained the ability to more earnestly articulate their own desire. The social war spreads and as it spreads, we open up the possibility of seeing one another in earnest, of really finding one another.

space and cultivate a willingness to lean into grief with intention. We must cultivate a generalized antagonism.

In order to more easily tap into our grief in order to make use of our suffering to inflict meaningful strikes on the structures that caused it, we must be able to articulate the causes of that grief and suffering. We must be able to name our enemies and explicitly analyze the suffering they cause us. Accurate, meaningful, articulation of how we experience the world and how we might affect it is far easier said than done and it requires consistent practice. It requires a willingness to sit in the discomfort of insecurity and uncertainty. It requires space to speak honestly and openly with others who have a willingness to speak earnestly themselves, without any posturing or projection of self-importance. We must give one another the confidence to speak definitively about how we experience the world individually, while encouraging the humility to recognize that our experience is limited and inherently subjective. We must speak earnestly and definitively about how this world is killing us, but we must do so with care.

As we are better able to articulate the causes of our suffering and the grief that comes from them, the better poised we become to act against the death machines. We grow more aware of their presence in our daily lives, and how our daily lives serve to reproduce them. We become more aware of what action may really undermine the machines and their reproduction, both in the context of clandestine acts, but more importantly, as daily positionality. Our grief becomes a resource to tap into, to remind ourselves why it is we say “fuck the police” whenever and wherever the police make their presence felt. We remind ourselves that to live tied to a logic of self-preservation is to live suffering become less obfuscated, their violences more explicitly felt and seen as these fears begin to shift. As we allow ourselves to question not only *what* is, but *why* it is, it becomes impossible not to see the cruel meaninglessness of so much of our suffering. It becomes impossible not to recognize that it truly doesn’t have to be the way that it is.

Coupled with that shifting of fears, grief has a way of distorting linear time. The seconds take years to pass and you feel as though you could count every cell in your body. Days are measured in heartbeats and voids fallen into or narrowly avoided. The order of events, and the amount of time between them, becomes almost impossible to state. Decades old memories force their way into your skull with all the intensity of emotions actively experienced. You drive on autopilot to the house a friend hasn’t lived at in years because you forgot they left town. As disorienting as these experiences are, they also necessitate the questioning of reality. We are forced to look more closely at everything around us and to question what it even means for something to be “real”. And if what is “real” is that which produced our grief and suffering in the first place, might we not be able to substitute that reality with one of our own design.

So, as we lean into grief, our willingness to question the necessity of this present reality shifts, our fears shift and with them so too can our priorities. The more deeply we are willing to embody the grief we experience, the deeper we question the structures around us, the more our fears shift away from acute-self-preservation and towards the existential, and the more willing we can become to actually live in accordance with the worlds we claim to desire. We become willing to risk because we recognize that we have already lost so much, that we are

actively losing more and more of ourselves every day this world of death goes on existing.

This is seen most clearly in the vigil-turned-riot. How often have we seen gatherings, initially intended as spaces to mourn someone murdered by the police, become the focal point of rebellion. Cries of despair to nobody in particular become articulated threats towards the physical manifestations of the cause of one's grief. "Hands up don't shoot" becomes "Fuck you, we shoot back". When one realizes that all that is expected of them (and those they love) is to suffer and die, that this world is intentionally built on that fact, the grief of that realization manifests in bricks hitting cruiser windshields, baseball bats hitting jail windows, cobblestone hitting the riot line, and casings hitting the street. The logic of self-preservation is turned on its head. For many, there is no *self* worth preserving in a world where that self is defined by one's capacity to serve the machine of racial capitalism. If living in the existent world is to live in service of that machine, then the only path towards a life worth living is to destroy that world by any means necessary or to die trying.

To fully embody our grief, we must be willing to lean into this logic against logic, embrace the raw desire to refuse everything around us and force into the public and commercial spheres, the suffering we are taught to bear privately. We must force those spheres to bear, collectively, the weight of the pain that we have been forced to bear individually. But what does it take to fully embody our grief, rather than to stifle it in an effort to prioritize our functioning in a society that was already killing us?

III. Grief and Social War

So far so good
So far so good
So far so good

The logical conclusion of grief experienced to its fullest extent is social war; a refusal of the existent in its entirety as the form of daily life. There is no more genuine expression of grief than to demand the world around you cave and quake with your pained breathing and desperate cries, to deny reality as you are told to accept it and force your own desired ways of relating to the world as replacement. Social war is grief, experienced individually, externalized publicly such that a collective experience of grief becomes possible. The vigil becomes a riot. Those who scream in anguish become those who scream in rage. Those who mourn at the casket become those who fight at the barricade. Those on whom suffering is imposed as a consequence of the existent world's functioning turn that suffering back onto this world with destructive aims.

But acute grief can only sustain such a positionality for so long. As the waves of emotion crest and fall back down towards some pre-existent baseline, so too can one's willingness to refuse this world fall back down. Most people only allow themselves to embody grief when circumstances push them so far beyond what their rationality is able to keep bound; a parent losing a child, a lover losing their partner, a friend losing their comrade to name a few such circumstances. For those of us who wish to see social war expand, be sustained, and push further with each insurrectionary moment we must find ways to open